

of subjection, of pedantry, of drudgery had become equally inrooted and, some will think, exaggerated. Even at the College de Guyenne all he learnt was by truant reading in stolen hours.

But if freedom and health were his ruling passions, there still remains the essential question of the use to be made of them. Without activity freedom is empty, and health impossible. More than half his life had passed before he found the final answer, in literary creation.

At first he studied law. Very young he became a counsellor in the Parliament of Bordeaux, Special missions took him to Court. He admits that he had felt the prickings of ambition. He admits that he felt also and indulged far more freely an appetite for gallantry. But he was too frank, too critical, too easy-going and too humane for a successful career in the ruthless France of the religious wars. In 1570, after his father's death, he resigned his magistracy and retired to his estate* He was thirty-seven.

After sixteen years of service, the remaining half of his life should be in his own. On his next birthday a quaint Latin inscription in his library recorded how 'Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the bondage of the law and of public office, had withdrawn to rest on the bosom of the learned Virgins'.

But inactivity is not rest. He found his mind, left fallow, was beginning to grow weeds and whimsies. He

realised what I believe is true of all lives, and
certainly of
bookish ones, that well-being depends, for
individuals as
for states, on a proper balance of imports
and exports.
Passively to absorb, without some
corresponding activity
to keep things even, can only leave a mind
stuffed yet
unsatisfied. Then came the idea of writing
down his
own stray thoughts. The balance was
restored* Mon-
taine was safe for life; he was safe for
immortality.